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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000041

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MW SR LO

SUBJECT: EU "FACILITATOR" LAJCAK UPDATES ON MONTENEGRO

REFERENDUM

REF: BELGRADE 00054

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee, for reasons
1.4 (B)(D).

¶11. (C) Ambassador and DCM took advantage of a January 18 meeting on other subjects to get an update from PolDir Miro Lajcak on his efforts as EU "facilitator" for Montenegro. Fresh from his Jan.17 briefing of EU experts in Brussels, Lajcak told us that his idea of posing two positive questions -- pro-independence and pro-continuation of union -- on the referendum ballot ran into considerable EU opposition, and likely would not survive. These EU members would accept only a qualified majority system, which the two-question format does not provide. He termed the Montenegrin government's position of 40 percent turnout of registered voters "too low," and reiterated that the Belgrade- and opposition-supported requirement of a "yes" vote by 50 percent of registered voters was a guarantee that the referendum would fail, and thus unacceptable. Responding to the Ambassador's question, Lajcak thought the talks would have to find a qualified majority alternative, perhaps requiring 50 percent turnout plus a 55 percent "yes" vote. In any event, he would present a formula first to the EU and U.S. for consensus before putting anything in front of the parties. He believes the parties are looking beyond his official status as an EU "observer" and seek concrete guidance on an "acceptable" solution.

¶12. (C) Lajcak stressed the need for the EU and U.S. to speak with one voice. U.S. statements supporting the EU efforts are welcome and necessary. Lajcak emphasized that he expected an "unhelpful" Belgrade to interfere with the referendum campaign through the media and Orthodox Church. He asked that the USG urge Belgrade to be "restrained, neutral, and not destructive," even as the EU and we continued to engage an opposition (at least the three of the four opposition parties willing to participate in the referendum talks) that wanted to prolong the process beyond April 30. Engagement with the opposition meant EU acknowledgement that it did not consider opposition to the referendum as opposition to Europe -- just to the Montenegrin government. As for timing, Lajcak sees no reason for an extension beyond April, and the international community should make that clear. He reiterated that when the talks begin January 23, he wanted all the parties to communicate ideas and reaction through him, not directly to each other.

¶13. (C) Lajcak concluded with a plea to urge Belgrade and the Montenegrin parties to begin planning for the "day after" the referendum, regardless of outcome, something Belgrade has been unwilling to do. If the vote was for independence there would be thousands of issues to work out, and Belgrade would not be helpful in finding solutions. If negative, the parties would still face tough issues affecting Serbia-Montenegro relations.

VALLEE

NNNN